

## Blu-ray Review: Devastating Honesty of Bergman's 'Autumn Sonata'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 25, 2013 - 9:05am

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CHICAGO – “Autumn Sonata,” Ingrid Bergman’s last film and first collaboration with cinema’s other great Bergman (Ingmar), is a challenging film. Is it pure melodrama or is it raw human emotion? The line is a fine one, enhanced by the theatricality of the film, one that opens with a character breaking the 4th wall. And yet I choose to take “Autumn Sonata” seriously and not as emotional manipulation, a decision enhanced by the enlightening essay in the Criterion edition by Farran Smith Nehme, which reveals how much of both Bergman’s own issues with parenthood may have impacted this caustic commentary on how we don’t really change, even as death is staring us in the face.



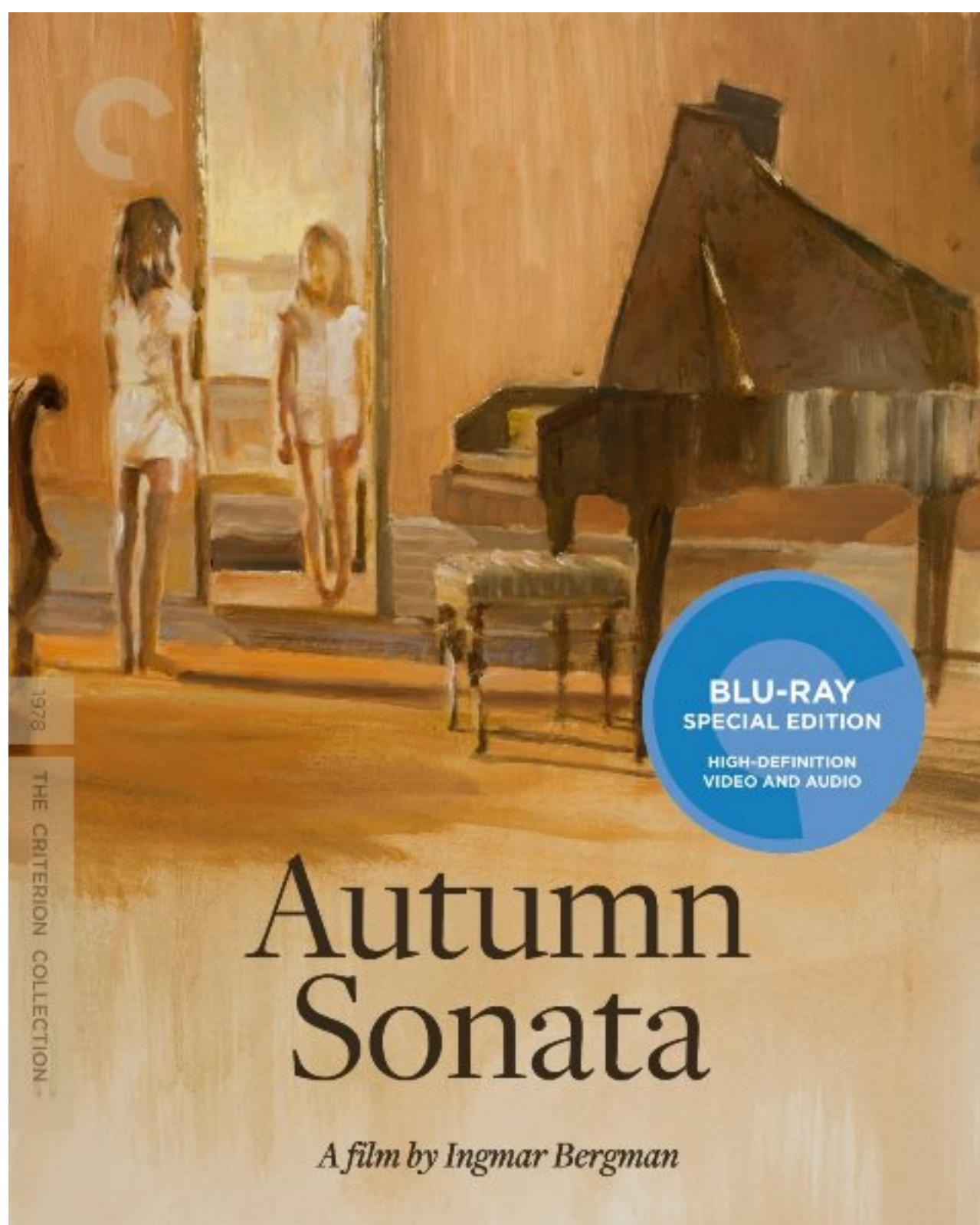
Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Bad parents are as old as the form of fiction and yet Charlotte (Bergman) is a particularly loathsome one. In “Autumn Sonata,” the famed pianist is coming home to visit her daughter but also clearly hopes to find some peace with her offspring before her final notes are played. And it seems that the quiet, peaceful Eva (Liv Ullman) may allow that to happen. She is first seen in quiet repose, Ullman’s good looks bottled up under tightly braided hair and over-large glasses. By contract, Bergman is a force of nature, bursting on to the scene that makes it clear she’s always the most outspoken person in the room. She won’t be tonight.

“Autumn Sonata” is a film about revelations, a film about finally saying what needs to be said and realizing that the myth that all emotional wounds heal may not be true when it’s parents who do the damage to their children. It’s a riveting piece of work with two actresses (and a filmmaker) so completely committed to the moment and the truth of these issues that the arguable melodrama never registers. The “fight” is a stunning cinematic achievement, shot (as Bergman so often did) in striking close-up, not only allowing his two incredibly talented stars no room for facade but adding to the depth of the moment through their appearance. Bergman’s eyes show regret that blurs the line between character and actress while Ullman registers pain beneath a quiet resignation. “*The mother’s failures are paid for by the daughter.*” This scene has a cross-generational, cross-era power that will never dissipate.

The Blu-ray transfer of “Autumn Sonata” is good but imperfect. Some of the more darkly-lit scenes have a degree of grain to the picture that’s inconsistent. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not one of those people who think that all films should be grain-free in HD. But there needs to be a consistency to the picture quality. Don’t have alternating shots in the same scene with drastically different degrees of HD polish. It feels like that happens here a few times.

The special features on “Autumn Sonata” are ridiculously extensive, including a 206-minute documentary about the making of the film that includes footage from every stage of production in what sometimes feels like uncut form. A commentary by a Bergman expert, that great essay, even a new subtitle translation — none of it matters without the truth of what’s on-screen. Don’t look away.



Autumn Sonata was released on Blu-ray on September 17, 2013

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

#### Synopsis:

Autumn Sonata was the only collaboration between cinema's two great Bergmans: Ingmar, the iconic director of *The Seventh Seal*, and Ingrid, the monumental star of *Casablanca*. The grand dame, playing an icy concert pianist, is matched beat for beat in ferocity by the filmmaker's recurring lead Liv Ullmann, as her eldest daughter. Over the course of a day and a long, painful night that the two spend together after an extended separation, they finally confront the bitter discord of their relationship. This cathartic pas de deux, evocatively shot in burnished harvest colors by the great Sven Nykvist, ranks among Ingmar Bergman's major dramatic works.

#### Special Features:

- o Introduction By Director Ingmar Bergman From 2003
- o Audio Commentary Featuring Bergmann Expert Peter Cowie
- o New Interview With Actor Liv Ullmann
- o Conversation Between Actor Ingrid Bergman and Critic John Russell Taylor At The National Film Theatre In London From 1981
- o Trailer
- o The Making Of Autumn Sonata
- o Booklet Featuring An Essay By Critic Farran Smith Nehme

*"Autumn Sonata" was released on Criterion Blu-ray and re-released on Criterion DVD on September 17, 2013.*



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